

# **The Healing Capacity of Mantra-s in Yoga Therapy**

A research study and final thesis paper  
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## I. Introduction

The power of sound is something each one of us has felt in their lives, yet not many people are really conscious of its strong impact or subtlety, nor do many use it consciously as a means for healing or transformation. We all know that certain sounds, whether it is voices, simple tones, elaborate symphonies, mantras or noises cannot just awaken memories but also create instant feelings of upliftment, stimulation, connection as well as sadness or dislike. Even people that have never come across any form of mantra or sound healing, might have had experiences like suddenly crying in a concert or coming home from a musical venue feeling refreshed and inspired.

For me mantras are one of the most powerful tools of Yoga as they work with and on the most intrinsic part of our being: vibration. If we look at our atomic structure, we are nothing else than vibrating atoms. Mantras also work with the mind and retrain it, while at the same time bypassing any logical understanding. In that way, they are like prayers. You say something, and the response you get comes from a different plane. Many times I had mantras work on me like teachers in their own right. I had certain Sanskrit words, sometimes syllables or lines out of certain mantras repeat themselves in my mind ad infinitum. For everyone who has practiced mantras in their life, it is a common experience: You chant or listen to a mantra, but when you are finished reciting or listening, it doesn't mean the mantra stops. Instead, it might suddenly come up during your day or continue it's mantra japa (repetition) in your head even when you want to sleep.

The first mantra that ever had that effect on me was the Gāyātrī. I remember hearing it when I started practicing Yoga and it would not leave me alone after that. I could only recollect maybe two or three of the words of the mantra, but as these few words went on repeating themselves over weeks without wanting to stop, at some point I dared approaching one of my Yoga teachers at that time and told her that I have this sound repeating itself and shyly uttered the few words and melody that I could recollect. Luckily she was able to figure out the mantra from my clumsy vocal trials and encouraged me to find out more about it.

When I started Vedic chanting, I remember being continuously drawn to the sound of the long 'Ā' letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, enjoying it thoroughly every time it came up in a word or syllable. It was and still is my favorite letter to produce and reproduce, now knowing that it

correlates to the air element, and leads to a feeling of opening and expansion.

I've also seen some of the transformational powers of mantras on myself. When I started chanting, I could not chant loudly. My voice would simply not come. In many ways I think this was quite symbolic, as I felt very insecure and not sure of my own "voice", especially in India. I remember my teachers in Chennai discussing whether my Udāna, the energy responsible for the throat and your voice, is simply not strong enough.

I then attended a two-week long chanting seminar on Kavacams, which are different energetic sound armors that can bring about protection and healing. I remember we chanted three hours per day and always when it was my turn to chant, I could not produce a loud sound. Three hours felt endless. And ruthless! At some point during the seminar, I got a huge red rash on my throat, depicting even physically the energetic knot that was there as well as the work that was done through the chanting. Of course, at that time, I didn't know that the rash correlated with a blockage being worked on. One day suddenly in class my voice came through. I could suddenly chant loudly and I still remember that the people sitting next to me and knew my usual chanting turned their heads and said: "Wow. What happened?" After that day the rash subsided, but the different volume of the voice has stayed with me since.

## II. The Power of Sound

### II.1. *Ancient understandings of sound as medium for healing, transformation and creation*

From the beginning of time, sound has always played a pivotal role for healing and transformation throughout the world. In many holy scriptures and mythological creation stories, no matter whether in East or West, sound has been the catalyst and primordial energy for manifestation. If we look at the Bible for example, it states that “In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God, and the word was God” (John 1:1). Similarly, the ancient Egyptians believed that the universe was created by the words of the God Thoth.

Yoga and Sāṃkhya philosophy also present creation as originating from sound. In the Sāṃkhyakārikā, one of the fundamental texts of the Sāṃkhya philosophy, it states that sound is the most fundamental structure of all of creation. From sound all other seed forms of matter develop, the tan-mātras as well as the five elements, the mind and senses. However, sound does not just mark the beginning, but is in some Vedic philosophies also perceived as the end of the cycle of rebirth, marking the complete dissolution. The last words of the Brahma sūtras (from Vedanta philosophy) are “Anavṛtṭiḥ Śabdāt, Anavṛtṭiḥ Śabdāt”, referring to the final absorption of the soul in primordial sound.

In early Vedic texts, sound and speech was glorified as the goddess Vāk, indicating that through sound (and mantras) realities can be manifested and formed in sacred ritual.

This ancient understanding of creation happening from the subtle to the gross and sound being the primordial catalyst for creation and dissolution is important when we want to understand healing through sound. If we acknowledge that sound is the subtlest part of creation from which all other forms emerge and are created, we know that through consciously using sound, we touch something inside us that exists beneath and beyond matter and can influence the elements, senses and the mind within us.

Sound has therefore a very long history of being incorporated into healing rituals and has always been a way to connect to the spirit realm.

Examples again can be found throughout the world and still exist in many indigenous traditions like the Aborigines in Australia, the

Shamans in Siberia and the ones in the Amazon for whom the so called icaros (mantras or songs) create a link between spirit and matter and have the potential to support or facilitate healing.

In ancient Greece and Italy in the schools of Pythagoras, sound was used as a spiritual medicine. Melodies and instruments were prescribed for anger and sadness and Pythagoreans were asked to listen to musical compositions to achieve stillness of mind<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, ancient temples and healing spaces around the world often exhibit an incorporation of natural sounds (like being built near water to not just use the substance as part of rituals and as purifier but also to have its sounds assist with the healing). In the Vastu Shastra, the ancient architectural system of India, temples were built in sacred geometry, which again would reflect a specific frequency, similar to sacred Yantras (geometrical forms) always expressing a mantra, an underlying sound vibration.

Even the beginnings of modern medicine were still connected to sound. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, often took his patients to the healing temple of Asclepius. There music was used to re-establish the natural harmony of the body. In his time, people still thought that any form of disease was a musical inconsistency that can be healed through the implementation of special sounds.<sup>2</sup>

## II.2. *Modern research on sound and healing*

Sound has continued its importance in the indigenous and healing arts around the world, but throughout the centuries has lost its significance in modern medicine. In the past 100 years though, more and more research has led to a re-emerging interest in the healing abilities of sound.

In 1967, the Swiss scientist Hans Jenny founded a field of study called cymatics, derived from the Greek word “kyma”, meaning wave. Cymatics visually demonstrates the connection between sound and form. In different experiments over 14 years, Hans Jenny animated inert

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Ashley Farrand, *Healing Mantras*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. 1999

<sup>2</sup> Russil Paul, *The Yoga of Sound*. Novato: New World Library, 2004

powders, pastes and liquids into lifelike, flowing forms that mirrored nature, art and architecture. All patterns were created using sine-wave vibrations within the human auditory range. <sup>3</sup>

Due to his research, Jenny stated: *“The more one studies these things, the more one realizes that sound is the creative principle. It must be regarded as primordial. No single phenomenal category can be claimed as the aboriginal principle. We cannot say, in the beginning was numbers or in the beginning was symmetry, etc.... They are not themselves the creative power. This power is inherent in tone, in sound.”*<sup>4</sup>

Around 20 years later, the Japanese scientist and quantum physicist Masaro Emoto started to research and demonstrate the effects of sounds in the form of words on our consciousness and the material world. His research was primarily focused on water crystals and showed the incredible fact that water is receptive to external messages communicated through sound. His research showed additionally that any “form” of vibration has an impact- no matter whether the communicated words were spoken, written down, played as music or even just verbalized mentally. Positive messages connected with love or gratitude actually purified the water. The effect was visible as beautiful hexagonal patterns formed in the water crystals when these words were communicated. Also classical music had a similar effect on the water. But if cruel or violent thoughts or words were used, even just words that have a negative connotation like “Hitler” or “fool”, the water crystals shaped very chaotic and distorted patterns.<sup>5</sup>

When we consider that our bodies consist of 70 percent water, we start to understand that the words we speak, the thoughts we have as well as the sounds we expose ourselves to, have a direct effect on our subtle structures within the physical as well as the energy body. The most modern study on how thought and speech vibrations influence waters inside and outside us is from the German professor Dr Bernd Helmut Kroeplin, who showed that water drops from different geographical places carry different memories according to their environment and the “messages” they receive. His research also shows how sound, thoughts

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Jenny, *Cymatics: A study of Wave phenomena and Vibration*. San Francisco: Macromedia Press, 2001

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.janmeinema.com/cymatics/who\\_was\\_hans\\_jenny.html](http://www.janmeinema.com/cymatics/who_was_hans_jenny.html)

<sup>5</sup> Russil Paul, *The Yoga of Sound*. Novato: New World Library, 2004



and speech directly affects each water droplet (www.worldinadrop.com).

In the 80s and 90, Dr. Larry Dossey, an internist and one of the biggest advocates of integrative medicine in the United States of America, did a research on the power of prayer and found out that people who are prayed for (independent which faith and also whether it is directly or over distances) can find significant relief through positive words:

“Experiments with people showed that prayer positively affected high blood pressure, wounds, heart attacks, headaches, and anxiety. The subjects in these studies also included water, enzymes, bacteria, fungi, yeast, red blood cells, cancer cells, pacemaker cells, seeds, plants, algae, moth larvae, mice, and chicks; and among the processes that had been influenced were the activity of enzymes, the growth rates of leukemic white blood cells, mutation rates of bacteria, germination and growth rates of various seeds, the firing rate of pacemaker cells, healing rates of wounds, the size of goiters and tumors, the time required to awaken from anaesthesia, autonomic effects such as electrodermal activity of the skin, rates of hemolysis of red blood cells, and hemoglobin levels.”<sup>6</sup>

But sound doesn’t just affect us in the form of music or words that we are exposed to from the outside. Sound is also already intrinsic, paying again tribute to the fact that we all are nothing else than vibration. Apart from our atomic structure, science now also found out that the communication between cells and neurotransmitters also takes place in the form of vibration.

In her groundbreaking research, English molecular biologist Candice Pert proved that hormones and neurotransmitters throughout the human organism communicate with each other through distinctive vibrational sympathies. In her work *Molecules of Emotion* she explains that when there is harmony in our body, our cells are humming along with a certain tone that minimizes dissonance.<sup>7</sup>

Interesting enough, science is now indicating what Hippocrates was seeking in the temple of Asclepius long ago: healing becomes a way of tuning any discordance inside the body back into equilibrium!

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<sup>6</sup> Larry Dossey, *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995

<sup>7</sup> Candace B. Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

### II.3 Latest collaborations of sound frequencies for healing

In recent years, more and more collaborations start to re-cultivate the link between science and sound frequencies as methods to alter consciousness and generate healing. A recent example is Dr. Eben Alexander, a US neurosurgeon who is now collaborating with a sound company to influence brainwave patterns for deepened states of meditation. Through the use of selected sounds, including binaural beats, monaural beats, isochronic tones and other sound patterns, the brain's filtering effect is reduced and relaxed states are enhanced. Diverse recordings include ranges of delta, theta and alpha rhythms that harmonically draw your brain into hypnagogia, the transitional state between wakefulness and sleep. The company suggests that these meditative journeys with sounds quickly bring you to expanded states of consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

### III. Mantras

#### III.1 What are mantras?

According to the tradition, the most important definition of mantras is “*Mananāt trāyate iti mantraḥ*” which translates to “On reflection it protects, hence it is a mantra”. It means that mantras help us to get out of negative mindsets by us focusing on them. Mantras are never negative, in the Pūrva Mimāṃsa text of Jaimini, mantras are defined as “that which praises is known as a mantra” (“*tat codakeṣu mantrākhyāḥ*”).<sup>9</sup>

In Yogic understanding, our mind is colored by past experiences and belief systems, which create our perception and therefore reality. If we continuously hold negative thoughts in our minds or even have loops of reoccurring negative thoughts throughout our days, we will perceive and project our reality from those thought forms. Mantras introduce something positive and by holding these positive vibrations in our mind, we change the direction and momentum of our experience and reality.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://sound.sacredacoustics.com/>

<sup>9</sup> From Dr. Kausthub Desikachar’s seminar “Mantra Yoga”, April 2014

In the Yogasūtras of Patañjali, he recommends that when negative thoughts disturb our mind, we should replace them with positive ones (Yogasūtra 2.33. “*Vitarka bādhane pratipakṣa bhāvanam*”). Sometimes this can be a difficult task to do, because we might not be able to “think” of something positive in such a moment. But we can always repeat a mantra that helps us introduce a change or positive vibration to our minds.

The Yogic tradition defines many mantras as “apauruṣeya”, meaning not of human origin. This is especially true for Vedic mantras, which are also referred to as “śruti”, “that which is heard”. It means that these mantras were heard and felt by the ancient seers of India in deep states of meditation. The mantras therefore depict and transmit a highly frequential experience and connect us back to the ancient Rishis. By repeating a mantra, you therefore not only use something that is positive, but you use something that is transmitting an inherently divine frequency. It is a recreation of the exact sounds of the very same experience that these ancient sages had through mantra. It therefore holds the ability to catapult us into an experience of higher consciousness.

Mantras are therefore sounds with a positive vibration and a higher frequency that, when we focus our mind on them, can protect us and even elevate us into a higher form of consciousness.

### III.2. *The specialty of the Sanskrit language*

The word Sanskrit comes from “saṁskṛtam”, which means well done or refined. Sanskrit is a well refined language. In Indian thought, Sanskrit is a divine language that was created by Śiva's drum.

The understanding of the Sanskrit language is very different to our modern languages. Our modern languages were meant to describe objects, so that people would understand each other. Modern semiotics (a part of linguistics) talks about signifier and signified, the signifier being the material form and the signified is the mental concept thereof. The sound itself plays a secondary role in semantics. So people in Great Britain will pronounce “table” very differently to people in the US and again differently to people in India or Australia. The sound has no importance other than to create an understanding of an object and people will understand what is meant and can therefore communicate with each other.

However, in Sanskrit all the importance lies on the sound. The meaning of the word doesn't reveal itself over the translation of the word. Instead, it exposed itself through the emanation of the sound itself. Therefore, Sanskrit sounds can't be altered and need to be pronounced in exactly the same way they were pronounced centuries ago. Sanskrit meaning is not achieved through a described object, but is revealed through the sound.

Many people say that Sanskrit never intended to describe an object, but rather wants to transmit an experience of higher consciousness. If you look up various Sanskrit words, you will find a whole range of meanings for one word. And there are also words for which a simplified and one-dimensional meaning is not possible like "Om" or "Śāntiḥ". Sanskrit brings us into the experience of the word rather than offer a mental understanding. Some people can talk hours about the meaning of "Om", yet only through one's own experience will we get a glimpse of what it actually means. It makes mantra-s also harder to grasp, because the language itself contains a psycho-spiritual effect that lies beyond intellect and mental conceptualism.

In ancient days, Sanskrit mantras were first taught without students knowing the meaning of what they were chanting. It enabled them to rest inside the experience rather than in a mental construct of a direct translation. Only when the sounds were memorized, the meaning was given. Indeed, you will find that it is a very difficult undertaking to try to translate Vedic Sanskrit into English, because our modern English often doesn't suffice in an adequate translation.

The importance of the vibrational experience connects to what Patañjali prescribed in the first sūtra of the Yogasūtras: "*Atha yogānuśāsanam*" - "now follow the teachings of Yoga", with "*ānuśāsanam*" referring to teachings that can and have to be experienced. So in Yoga, we don't want to just gain theoretical knowledge. All of the teachings are about enabling us to have an experience of Yoga.

On a pure physical level, the Sanskrit alphabet is produced from different areas of our bodies. There are sounds that are palatal, guttural, retroflex, dental, labial, nasal or a mix of the above. Some of the sounds are aspirates and have to be pronounced with a lot of "balam", strength, and usually a contraction of the abdomen. Some sounds produce friction, others are what is referred to as "*uṣmānāḥ*", sounds that produce heat in the body.

On a subtle level, the different syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet connect to different elements within the body. In Yogic understanding, the earth element is responsible for structure and your bodily built, the water element is responsible for binding and creation, the fire element is what gives the body temperature and what makes the body parts visible, wind is responsible to make things move (like our blood circulation) and the space element brings the capacity for expansion and contraction. See the following connection between sounds and the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in the graphics below:<sup>10</sup>

VĀYU air	AGNI fire	BHŪMI earth	ĀPA water	ĀKĀŚA space	Legends
a ā	i ī	u ū	r ṛ	l ṛ	Nasal
e	ai	o	au	arṅ	Gutural
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa	Palatal
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña	Retroflex
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	Dental
ta	tha	Da	dha	na	Labial
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	Alpaprāṇa
ya	ra	la	va	śa	Mahaprāṇa
ṣa	ṣa		sa	ha	

In the Vedic tradition expressed in Āyurveda and Yoga, the five elements make up our bodily constitution. When we want to influence a constitution, we usually strengthen the elements that are weak and use countering elements if one of the elements of a constitutional type has become aggravated. This is one reason why mantras are healing and how they can be used beneficially in Yogatherapy. We will explore their use in the tradition of T. Krishnamacharya now.

### III.3 Why are mantras healing?

Krishnamacharya gives the following definitions for disease: “*Śāririka mānasika aindriyaka vyutthāna avasthā vyādhiḥ*”, meaning that disease is a state of disturbance either at the body level, the mental level or the level of the senses. Also he defines disease as a state in which you are

<sup>10</sup> Referred to from the KHYF Vedic Chant Teacher Training, Module 4, 2016

disconnected from the divine and bound by the material: “*Paramātmani viyukta prakṛteḥ baddha avasthā vyādhiḥ*”.<sup>11</sup>

In the Yogasūtra-s Patañjali refers to our journey of Yoga and Yogatherapy as a journey from *vyutthāna saṁskāra* to *nirodha saṁskāra*, from patterns or vibrations of agitation and imbalance to patterns or vibrations of balance (YS 3.9).

The most subtle tool for changing our patterns and vibration is sound. Through introducing mantra we create what is called a *nava śabda saṁskāra*, a new pattern of vibration.

On a more gross physical level, mantras can create heat in the body through sounds of friction and the contraction of the abdomen. They can improve digestion and elimination, strengthen the lung capacity, elongate the breath, improve circulation, help with speech impairments and relax and release a locked jaw.

On a mental and emotional level they can vitalize the senses, calm a stressed or fearful mind, bring light-ness when someone feels constricted or depressed, help with focusing the mind, strengthen self-confidence and help restraint negative thinking.

When we look at Krishnamacharya’s second definition, we also see that he defined disease as a disconnection from the divine. When we look at the word for disease in Sanskrit, the word is *vyādhi*. It can be split into ‘*vy*’, which means a disconnection and ‘*adhi*’, which means the self. It refers to the eternal part of you, the real self or higher self, that which is connected to the divine and is an expression thereof. A disease is therefore also by the wording defined as a disconnection from the divine self. Health on the contrary is named as *Svastha*, ‘*sva*’ again denoting the self and ‘*stha*’ meaning to stay with the self. So a connection to the self is health and a disconnection to the self is disease. In many ways this describes our journey of Yoga, in which we want to move from an identification with our mind and senses to an innerstanding of our Puruṣa, the part in each one of us that is the real self, eternal and unchanging.

The chanting and recitation of Vedic mantras is referred to as *adhyayanam*. Again we can find the word ‘*adhi*’ and ‘*ayanam*’ meaning a journey towards. So the practice of mantra is helping us to come closer

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<sup>11</sup> from the KHYF Yoga Therapy Training, Module 1, August 2014

to and travel towards the self. So through its etymological understanding we can grasp the magnitude of importance that was given to mantras to help us not only out of sickness and achieve a state of health, but also move into the direction of Yoga itself. Through these word derivations we also get an understanding why mantras need to be an essential part of yoga therapy.

#### *IV. Objective of Study*

##### *IV.1. Mantras in Yogatherapy and in the tradition of T. Krishnamacharya and TKV Desikachar*

Traditionally, Vedic chanting and mantras were only available to the male Brahmin caste. Because of their divine origins they are considered sacred and were therefore only passed on orally to those that were deemed appropriate (which was only the priest caste). All others had to create their own mantras and songs and for many centuries, Vedic chanting was reserved for few. Many of the mantras that we can readily access today were kept secret for a very long time.

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was a Brahmin and therefore had the opportunity to learn the mantras from an early age onwards. He became well versed in all the Vedas and the different Vedic philosophies. Later, when he became a Yoga teacher and gave practices to his students, he incorporated mantras and noticed how powerful they were on his students' developments, healings and transformations. He therefore decided that for the benefit of humanity, these mantras should be readily accessible by all and also clearly stated that all practices of Yoga should be practiced *Samantraka*, with mantras.

It was therefore T. Krishnamacharya who opened the doors of Vedic Chanting to everyone, independent of gender, nationality or caste and who defined and proved their importance for healing in Yogatherapy. His son TKV Desikachar and grandson Kausthub Desikachar have upheld this tradition and mantras are still an important part of Yogatherapy in the tradition of T. Krishnamacharya and TKV Desikachar today.

##### *IV.2. Hypothesis and Study*

Mantras can instigate deep change at very subtle layers of our being and can consequentially bring about profound transformation and healing. Mantras should be, as stressed by T. Krishnamacharya and the

tradition of T Krishnamacharya and TKV Desikachar, a steady component of most yoga therapy sessions and practices.

My goal for this study was to prove the powerful effects that mantras can have, as well as present the changes through mantras on the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual layers of an individual. I was also trying to find out more about the individual process and experience of mantras if practiced over a longer period of time (three months). The study also wanted to shed some light on what “protecting the mind” actually means as an effect that is stated for mantras. And in which way people are stronger connected to themselves through their use. Additionally, the intention of the study was to see what happens if the mantra is the clear focus of the therapeutic practice instead of the other tools of Yoga.

## V. *Methodology*

### V.1. *Research Setting and Design*

All of my research took place in 2017. Each of the students was supposed to be accompanied over a three month period in which I would meet the participant every second week over Skype to monitor and note down the process of change, healing and transformation as well as their own personal observations about the effects of the mantras on different levels of their being. All students were informed as to the nature of the research and assured that they should only participate if they were happy and willing to do so and they had the option to drop out of the program at any point. The type of interviews that were conducted in each session were oral and unstructured and were always pointing and exploring the experience of the mantra within the yoga therapy process. Because of the very specific setting for the study and the three months in which the effect of one mantra was to be explored, I only changed the mantra-s in very few cases in which another mantra at a certain point of the process seemed more helpful for the student. Also, I was trying to let people share their processes with as little interference, interpretation and directive guidance from my side as possible, so that the effects that the mantra-s themselves had on their healing would become more evident.

### V.2. *Students*

15 female students enrolled for the research project. All of them had different levels of knowledge and experience of Yoga. There were some that had never practiced any Yoga before and some that were already Yoga teachers. Some of these people knew this tradition from before,



others completely didn't. All of them came for different reasons and problems that they wanted to work on with the help of the mantra practice, from depression and general feelings of negativity over anxieties to seeking more peace and clarity. The majority of people came with problems that were more connected to the emotional, psychological or mental layers than an actual physical disease. The age of the students ranged between ages 29 and 67 years. The students came from different parts of the world, among them Germany, Australia, UK, New Zealand, USA, Canada and Spain.

### *V.3. Practices*

All practices that were given to the students had their focus on a very specific mantra that was used throughout the practice. All practices contained japa, which are rounds of repetitions in which just the mantra is chanted. Often this mantra japa was first done loudly, then softly and then mentally. Additionally, most students received a longer chant to listen to once a day. The practices given were quite reduced in terms of the amount of other tools used, so that the focus on the mantra would remain.

Most practices contained simple nyāsa-s with mantra. Nyāsa-s are placements in which the hands are placed on certain parts of the body while mantras can be recited. Often times, I incorporated some simple breathing exercises in the beginning so that the participants would have a moment to arrive in the present moment and center themselves. The practices were all about 10 to 15 minutes long, because I wanted to create a time duration that is actually possible for people to sustain throughout the period of three months. After the practice, all students were advised to either sit or lie down for five to ten minutes to absorb the vibrations of the mantra and observe its effects.

Some of the practices can be seen as samples in the appendix of this paper.

## *VI RESULTS*

### *VI. 1. Case 1*

The first student, a female yoga teacher from Germany, 51 years old, wanted to gain confidence and self love through the help of yoga therapy. This student knew this tradition and had some experience of chanting. When we started the process she found herself in an extramarital and emotionally abusive relationship in which she described herself as addicted to the approval of the other person. The student felt unable to stand up for herself against others, had a strong pattern of wishing to please and had a hard time accepting rejection. She felt emotionally unstable, nervous and scattered. She couldn't center herself and didn't feel worthy.

After consulting with my mentor Dr. Kausthub Desikachar, the first mantra that was chosen for her to work with was "mā aham sarvam", a mantra that points to the divine in each one of us. It reminds us that we are all worthy, because we are actually divine, "everything". The mantra was meant to make her feel enough and worthy over time and increase her self-value.

Her morning practice began with twelve breaths freely with the hand on the heart to help her connect to herself. It was followed by three rounds of śārīra nyāsa in which she had to touch different parts of the body (feet, knees, thighs, navel, heart, throat, head), inhale at these places and chant the mantra on exhale. In this way the mantra is not just placed at these different parts but is also placed like an energetic armor around her. Afterwards, she had to chant the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times silently. At the end of her mantra japa she was asked to lie down with her hands on her heart and feel the vibration of the mantra in herself for another five to 10 minutes. At another point of the day that she could chose for herself she was also asked to listen to a longer chant called Durgā sūktam. This chant invokes the fire god and asks for the blessings of fierce goddess Durgā to remove any obstacles. It usually gives a lot of energy, self-confidence and strength.

When I met the student two weeks afterwards, she told me how much she is struggling with the mantra practice, especially with its meaning of her being everything. She said she felt so far from being everything so whenever she was chanting she felt her heart could not connect to the words. She felt like a fraud. The student also revealed that she

wasn't daring to chant in front of her family. Therefore she had to wait until the whole family had left her house to start with the practice which was challenging for her.

Despite the resistance, the student agreed to continue with the mantra for some time longer to see if her connection to the mantra might change over time. She had accepted my advice to try to connect with the sound rather than the intellectual meaning and to focus on listening to her own voice while chanting.

After a month of the practice the student felt good with the mantra. The dislike had changed into an actual liking of the sound of it and she had stopped judging it. During a meeting with her siblings about heritage matters she suddenly heard the mantra repeating in her ear and was able to stand up for her own matters. She had realized that many of the patterns of not voicing herself did stem from her own childhood. The affair had been ended and consequently she felt a new opening with her husband. She still didn't feel courageous enough to practice in front of her own family.

After one and a half months of the mantra practice the student experienced deep conflicts. Her ex-boyfriend threatened her with suicide and she had a hard time not being pulled in by his drama and keeping up her own space. To refocus on herself and to work with the concept of space a little bit more, I asked her to integrate short inhale holds in the śārīra nyāsa part of her practice and to visualize sitting inside her own inner space.

After two months the student had realized more of her own unhelpful patterns. She had realized how strongly her root chakra was affected through the rejections of her family members. A lot of energetic blockages in that area as well as in the throat area felt lighter through crying in the past weeks. The hold after inhale had helped her sit in stillness. She felt pulled stronger into silence thanks to the hold after inhale. Slowly she felt more capable not to be pulled into the drama of her ex boyfriend and was a bit more able to detach and observe from a point of distance.

After two and a half months, the meeting could not take place. After three months the students felt more detached and more able to not take things so personally. She said that the mantra practice had become an important tool for her to start her day in stability and to remain

detached from others. In general, she felt more strength to tackle even difficult situations, even if not all of her problems had yet been solved.

## VI. 2. Case 2

The second student, a 40 year old female photographer and mother from Germany, came to yoga therapy feeling very frustrated with her life and slightly depressed. She was lacking energy and was often suffering from migraine. She was not working a lot because she had to take care of the children and felt trapped in the role of housewife and mother. Her children were very active and restless. There were often fights between the siblings which the mother had a hard time handling. She was often worried about her children and the general restless and intense mood at home. Her thoughts would not stay focused on the present moment, instead she would daydream, imagine far distance travels and a different life from the one she was living. Her outlook on life was mostly negative. This student had practiced in this and other Yogic traditions before and knew a little bit of chanting and mantras.

After a discussion with my mentor which mantras are best given in times of negativity and depression, the mantra she was asked to work with was the Gāyatrī mantra, a very powerful mantra on the female form of the sun. The mythology of the mantra is that the gods spoke this mantra over water and poured the water then over some demons, who through the power of this mantra, dissolved. The Gāyatrī is meant to give light, positivity and hope and remove feelings of negativity.

The practice of the student started with her visualizing the sun in the heart and taking 12 breaths freely, to connect her back to her own light. Then she was asked to do śārīra nyāsa for one round with the chanting of the Gāyatrī in each position. Afterwards, she was asked to chant the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times silently. After the practice she was meant to remain sitting or lying for five to 10 minutes to absorb the vibrations of the mantra. At another point of the day, she was asked to listen additionally to the Gāyatrī Kavacam, a chant that builds a protective armor of the sun around the person.

When I met the student two weeks later she had just been on holiday, but even on holiday she could not connect to her own joy and only reported negatively. It was hard for her to concentrate on the mantra and focus during the practice. She had also gained more weight on holiday which made her feel even more depressed and frustrated.

A month later the student felt slightly better. She felt more light in general and had more stamina. When asked about what had changed she reported that one of her children that she was often very worried about had started to practice the Gāyatrī with her. He had picked up the mantra and every time he felt overwhelmed he started going into his own room, closed the door and repeated the Gāyatrī mantra until he felt better. Seeing that one of her children was feeling better through the help of the Gāyatrī made the mother less worried which in turn made her feel lighter and happier. It also helped with the general atmosphere at home, as the boy would now be much more peaceful.

After one and a half months the student had a hard time keeping up with the practice and motivating herself to do it. She said she still had a hard time staying focused. She felt that repeating the Gāyatrī so many times was arduous and took too much of her time. She wanted something that gives her more energy, so we changed the mantra to Om paraśaktyai namaḥ. The practice remained the same but the śārīra nyāsa was done for three rounds.

After two months the heaviness was still dominant for the student and therefore four rounds of samantraka (with mantra) sun salutations were included in the practice as well as some simple āsanās and the balancing breath of nāḍī śodhana (all accompanied by the mantra). She was also still holding extra weight in the body, so the body needed more movement and breath work to reduce the heaviness in her body and overall energy. I also thought that through the movement, it would be easier for the student to focus on the mantra practice.

After two and a half months the student felt much better. She had gained strength and had reduced weight. The feedback about her overall feeling and state of mind was much better.

After three months the student was very happy with the practice. She felt light and had more energy for the day. It was easier for her to keep the focus because of the movements in the practice. She felt the mantra as powerful and uplifting. She was continuing with the practice even after the research period was over.

#### *VI. 3. Case 3*

The third student was 44 years old and a college teacher from Australia who wanted to work on her throat chakra and on her capacity to speak her own truth. She had suffered from a massive childhood trauma at

age 9 when her mother married a new man who turned out to be physically violent. When she was trying to communicate her fear and abuse as a child he was shutting her down through physical violation. As a consequence she developed quinsy at age 9 ( a disease in which toxic blood is formed from the tonsils) and was suffering from an autoimmune disorder after the age of 10. She wanted to work with a mantra that can open her heart, so that she would regain confidence in her own truth. She also wanted to work on her voice and the throat chakra. This student had chanted before in another Yogic tradition and knew this tradition from some seminars.

The mantra that was chosen for the student was “Hā vū”, a mantra that is deeply heart opening and at the same time contains the syllable “Ha” which connects with the throat chakra and therefore also helps opening the voice.

Her practice, similar to what was given to the other participants of the research study, started with 12 free breaths with the hands on the heart to start reconnecting her to herself. Then she did three rounds of śārīra nyāsa, of which one round was done with hā vū, one round with hā vū hā, and one round with hā vū hā vū.

Therefore the exhale was also lengthened with each round, which adds to the effect of langhana and relaxation. After that, she was asked to touch her navel and chant the mantra 12 times loudly, then touch the heart and chant the mantra 12 times softly and touch her head and chant the mantra 12 times mentally. In the end she was asked to rest quietly for 5 to 10 minutes either seated or lying. At another point of the day she was asked to listen to the full Hā vū chant that describes the feeling one gets when merging with the absolute.

Two weeks later the student reported that she felt very relaxed after the practice and that she was clearly feeling the vibration in her body. She was also reporting that she was becoming more vulnerable. Very old memories started to surface from when she was five years old and the farm of her grandparents together with all the animals was sold. The grief she had felt as a young child when losing the animals on the farm was suddenly coming up and was being released. Also, through the mantra practice, she started becoming more aware of the moments in which she was not aligning with her own truth.

A month into the practice, she felt her sleep patterns were shifting and she became a bit more restless. She was noticing that she was able to express her own opinion a bit stronger in her work environment and was

able to say 'no', which previously had been rather difficult for her. She felt strongly connected to the sound of the mantra and its vibration.

One and a half months into the practice the student had a profound healing experience. Her boyfriend was triggering past memories from her stepfather. After an initial agitation and an instant manifestation of a throat infection that she felt linked her even physically back to her original trauma, she was able to voice her discomfort towards her boyfriend and was also able to explain to him why she felt triggered. And because her reaction had changed and she was able to openly address what was bothering her, her new boyfriend was able to hold the space for her and was reacting in an understanding and supportive way. This in turn presented the student with a moment of extreme healing in which her voice and truth was accepted, held and also appreciated.

She felt light and extremely positive and happy about the practice and its development on her ability to voice herself.

After this profound healing experience, the student continued with the practice, but did not participate in the further research as she felt very strongly connected to her own voice and truth and the expectations that she had come with to therapy had been met. She was very content.

#### VI. 4. Case 4

The fourth student was a 60 year old jewelry designer from Spain. She was hoping to feel safer through the mantra practice. This student had practiced Yoga and Kirtan chanting in other traditions before. She was noticing that in her own jewelry shop, she was talking a lot to her customers to cover her own vulnerability. She felt she had major trust issues and a lot of anxiety. She wanted a mantra that calms her down and gives her a feeling of safety. She also wanted to move a little bit in the practice as she was hoping to do the practice when she closes the shop.

The mantra that she was given to work with was 'Mām pāhi', which translates to 'protect me'. The sound of this mantra is especially soothing and calming, energetically it is considered langhana. The student's practice started with a small vinyasa krama/ sequence with five āsanās that started seated in Vajrāsana and went up to Adho mukha śvānāsana. On every exhale movement she was asked to chant the mantra. Then she was guided to sit down, put her hands on her heart and take 12 breaths freely. Afterwards, she did three rounds of śārīra nyāsa with the mantra. Then she

was asked to touch her navel and chant the mantra 12 times loudly, then touch her heart and chant 12 times softly and then touch her head and chant 12 times mentally. Immediately after, she was meant to lie down or sit quietly for another 5 to 10 minutes to absorb the vibrations of the mantra. At another point of the day, she was asked to listen to Śraddhā Sūktam, a longer chant that is dedicated to the goddess of faith and that is meant to give conviction and self-confidence.

After two weeks of the practice, the student found herself to be much calmer. She used the practice when she closed the shop and saw it as a means to give gratitude for the day. She felt the vibration of the mantra a lot in her head. She also felt that it became more apparent to her when she talked too much with her clients, therefore she felt that her awareness had become stronger.

A month into the practice the student felt a lot of vibrations in her head. She was also noticing that when she is doing śārīra nyāsa she would only be able to connect to the places that were from her hips upwards, but she was not able to feel her legs. She was realizing that her fears and distrust were physically connected to the first chakra and that the fears were also expressing themselves in a physical disconnection to her body below her own hips. She was trying to actively breathe into those parts and narrated her experience as feeling these parts slowly melting through the mantra and breath from having been frozen before. She also felt that her appetite was changing and was also feeling more balanced throughout the day.

A month and a half into the practice she would still feel numb below her knees, but felt her hips and thighs strongly vibrating. With it she felt more creativity coming back into her life. She felt more motivated again as well.

Two months into the practice she was reporting a strong clearing process that she had felt happening in the last weeks. Often times very strong topics of survival had come up and she felt herself rebirthing herself. She told me that she was crying and laughing a lot and felt a lot of release throughout. She felt that she was clearing identifications. She could now also feel her knees and feet during the practices. In her shop she felt really calm and also noticed that her conversations with the clients were changing and that she felt more secure in those interactions.

After two and a half months she felt more light and much more safe inside. She had a lot of new ideas of creating a new ecommerce shop and expanding her business. She said that the practice had become an essential



part of her daily routine. The energetic focus had also shifted from legs and feet to mouth and head.

After the three months she felt stable and safe. She felt very relaxed in the conversations and interactions with her clients. She felt strongly connected to the mantra and the calming effect it had on her.

#### VI. 5. Case 5

Student number 5 was a 29 year-old support worker and Reiki healer from Australia. She felt ungrounded, uncentered and lacking in trust in herself and the universe. She often felt herself doubting her own ideas and opinions and unable to voice them towards others. She wanted the practice to give her calm strength, support, trust and self-confidence. This student had practiced in other traditions before and was familiar to Kirtan chanting.

The mantra that was chosen for her was “Om śraddhāyai namaḥ”, which is a mantra for inner strength, self-confidence and faith. The student was asked to place her hands on her heart in the beginning of the practice and breathe 12 breaths freely into the heart. Afterwards, she was asked to do three rounds of śārīra nyāsa with the mantra. Then she was guided to place her hands on her navel and chant the mantra 12 times loudly, then place the hands on the heart and chant 12 times softly and then place the hands on the head and chant 12 times mentally. After the practice, the student was supposed to sit or lie quietly for another five to 10 minutes to absorb the vibrations of the mantra. At another point of the day, she was asked to listen to Śraddhā Sūktam, a chant dedicated to the goddess of faith that should strengthen the self-confidence and trust in her further.

Two weeks after starting with the practice the student gave the feedback that she felt a shift happening in her throat. Through her practice as a Reiki practitioner she was very aware of the energy flow within her body. She had also noticed that during śārīra nyāsa, her navel and heart were taking in more energy from the mantra, as if these two places needed more of the mantra than the other places on which she had placed her hands. She was also reporting that in her personal practice the mantra felt more strong and masculine, while she perceived the longer chant to be more feminine. She said it was reminding her to find her own balance within giving and receiving in the outside world. In general the practice made her feel very energetic.

After a month of the practice, her self-confidence had grown to such an extent that she had challenged herself and had decided to do a skydiving jump from a plane. She told that for her it felt as if she was stepping into her personal power and trusting her own capacities. During her days, she felt more centered and calm in general. She reported that the mantra was perceived as very healing, strong and tranquil at the same time.

One and a half months later, she said that she felt her body healing through the different sounds. As she was continuously repeating the mantra, it was slowly starting to split itself into several sounds that she experienced very differently. She felt the 'Om' sound connecting her to her authenticity and totality. She felt herself surrendering during the pronunciation of the 'yai' syllable. She felt the 'namah' syllable as very relaxing. She felt herself increasingly present to the sound effects of the mantra and also felt that there had been a huge shift in her throat and voice during the last weeks. She had also started working on her own website and felt herself moving out of her own comfort zone. She had started chanting along in the Śraddhā Sūktam and was reporting that one time she had chanted it several times and felt absolutely strong, full of energy and empowered.

Two months into the practice she had gone through a lot of stress in her business and at work. She was still doing the practice regularly and had also continued it through a fast and a cleansing process. She felt more balanced and had started giving more Reiki sessions. She was thinking a lot about getting a child and becoming a mother.

The session two and half months later was not happening due to both of us having full schedules and not finding an appointment.

After three months had passed she told me that she didn't feel stressed anymore even if she still had a lot of work. She said that she felt that a mantra practice is a beautiful gift for oneself. The student shared that through the practice she was learning to hold a space for herself and that it was teaching her to go out and come back inside as well as to have strength and determination. The lack of trust and connection that she had felt three months before had subsided. She was reporting that even in moments in which she felt very tired, she could feel the connection to her own heart and something higher.

## VI. 6 Case 6

The sixth student was a 64 year old university administrator from New Zealand. Her main reason to come to yogatherapy was the wish to work on her friendships and relationships with other people. She felt it hard to connect with others. She also often times felt suspicious and felt her heart as not being really open. The student shared that she was often the one who drove the friendships. She felt very masculine energetically in that respect and wanted to move more into receptivity, creativity, openness and also love herself more. This student had only practiced Yoga and mantras in other traditions before.

The mantra that was chosen for her was 'Om śrīm śrīyai namaḥ', the mantra of the divine feminine. It stands for abundance, openness, receptivity, spontaneity, for the attributes of the divine feminine and for being centered in the heart.

Her practice consisted of her breathing 12 breaths freely with her hands on her heart to start connecting her more to her own heart. Afterwards she was asked to do three rounds of śārīra nyāsa with the mantra in each position. Then she did mantra japa and was asked to chant the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. After her practice, she was meant to sit or lie down quietly and stay with the vibrations for five to 10 minutes, so that they could integrate. Once per day she was also asked to listen to Śrī Sūktam, a longer chant that is dedicated to the divine feminine and that is supposed to bestow the person who chants it with diverse forms of wealth.

Two weeks into the practice the student felt more gratitude arising in and for her life. With the gratitude, she felt her perception beginning to soften.

A month into the practice she was noticing strong changes. She felt much softer in her interactions with others. As a result, other people seemed to come forward towards her more often as well. She realized that if she is less rough and more open and soft, other people will respond to her and approach her differently as well. She was also observing how she was starting to listen to herself and her body more and she would start taking better care of herself. She therefore also felt a strengthened sense of self love and self care in her life. She was noticing how her fiery nature and sometimes sharp behavior was strongly influenced and softened through the practice of the mantra.

One and a half months into the practice she felt a lot of pressure at work and was noticing that she needed to relax more. She felt her heart opening and her creativity expanding. She was tuning the mantra in different pitches and started to do mantra japa even when she was walking outside as it made her feel more calm.

Two months into the practice she had very strong discussions with her ex husband. She felt much more vulnerable than usual and felt as if she was shedding things as well in her workplace as well as in her private life. She was also noticing that the mantra had a very strong effect on her throat. She was noticing that a lot of her brisk behavior was a defense mechanism and she felt more and more able to communicate her truth in a good way.

There was no session at two and half months due to mutual travels and other scheduled plans.

Three months into the practice the student reported that she felt the mantra resetting and repatterning her brain. She felt the mantra inside and with her at all times. She was noticing how others were bullying her at work and in her private life and she felt strong enough to set healthy boundaries for herself. Her final assessment of the mantra was that if you commit to it and observe it, it is very empowering and becomes part of your being. She shared that she felt the divine feminine power rising within very strongly due to the mantra practice. She said that she was able to accept her own vulnerability and was able to keep her heart more open and was also noticing that new friendships were slowly forming in her life.

## *VI. 7 Case 7*

The seventh student was a 50 year old family therapist from the UK. She was suffering from high acidity, stomach and digestion problems. Her goal was to reduce the acidity in her body through the mantra, but also to work on her self-confidence. She often felt overwhelmed by her emotions and not able to channel them appropriately. She felt bullied in her work place by several of her colleagues which she noticed as a childhood pattern that was playing out also in her private life with her sister. For a year she had been suffering from depression and was not very happy within her marriage. She felt lethargic and having too much kapha (an Ayurvedic Dosha, representing heaviness). She was hoping to gain more light, more centering, to feel less overwhelmed by her emotions and to reduce her acidity. This student had only practiced very little Yoga before.

After consultation with my mentor the mantra that was chosen for her was Om̐ dum̐ durgāyai namaḥ. Both Shiva and Durgā are gods that are known for being in control of their emotions. Durgā is a warrior goddess, she is self-confident and very strong. Even though the mantra is fiery, my mentor suggested that her problem with the acidity probably also resulted from not being able to stand up for herself and losing control emotionally. Therefore he suggested that the mantra could help strengthen the student's self confidence and emotional balance and thus reduce her acidity as a consequence.

The student was asked to start the practice with her hands on her heart and 12 breaths of free breathing. After that, she was meant to do śārīra nyāsa with the mantra. Then she was meant to inhale and hold her breath after inhalation for one to three seconds and then on the exhale chant the mantra loudly 12 times, softly 12 times and mentally 12 times. The inhale hold should strengthen her self-confidence and her feeling of abundance and fullness. After the practice she was asked to sit quietly for five to 10 minutes. One time per day, she was also asked to listen to Durgā Sūktam, a longer chant dedicated to goddess Durgā and the fire god.

Two weeks after starting her practice, she reported that in the first three days she had felt a strong surge of energy coming from the practice, which seemed to have subsided in the practices afterwards. She felt her mood a bit lifted but her digestion to be quite the same. Holding after inhalation seemed very difficult for her, she felt as if she was boycotting herself. She had applied for another job and had been invited to a job interview.

A month into the practice a lot had changed in her work situation. She had had a talk with her manager and was telling her manager about the colleagues that she felt bullied by. The manager had reacted with understanding and was trying to change the situation and had implemented some intervention. The student also had noticed that her posture had slightly changed and that she felt more calm in the interactions with her colleagues. Her relationship was also improving but her acidity remained quite strong.

One and a half months into the practice the student felt as if she was hitting a plateau from which nothing further developed. She felt her work situation as better but not yet resolved. Three people were still very much bothering her in the office, as they weren't acknowledging her presence and made her feel not needed or worthy.

Two months after starting her practice, the student confessed that for four days she didn't practice. When she recommenced the practice, again she had felt that surge of energy. Her work situation was still causing her a lot of anxiety and sadness, but she felt she was noticing and observing her emotional reactions to these interactions a bit more.

The session at two and half months was not taking place.

Three months after she had started the practice she had confronted some of the people in her work and felt that this had really helped her and also had shifted the situation a bit. Regarding her depression she still felt up and down but there was a new awareness and acceptance with the days on which she felt low. Her connection with her husband had improved strongly, he was reflecting on his own patterns and they were communicating more openly. She reported that she felt that her self-confidence had improved through the mantra and that it was charging her with energy. In terms of her acidity she had not been able to see any difference to before.

### *VI.8 Case 8*

Student number eight was a 61 year old retired postwoman from Canada. She felt highly distracted with a very short attention span. She felt that she was continuously busy and doing something and that it was difficult for her to slow down, keep quiet or be receptive. She felt very masculine in her energy to continuously do and achieve. Now that she had retired she was hoping to meditate more, center herself more, become more quiet, receptive and calm. Her whole constitution, but also mannerism and speech strongly pointed to a Vāta aggravation. She also wanted to increase her femininity over the course of the practice. She had practiced meditation in the past, but wasn't familiar with chanting or mantras.

After consultation with my mentor, the mantra that was chosen for her was 'Om Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ', a langhana mantra that is helping to bring peace and calm to the practitioner. Similar to the other practitioners, the practice was starting with her holding the hands on her heart and breathing for 12 breaths. Then she was supposed to do śārīra nyāsa with one round of simple "Om" and a second round with the full mantra. Afterwards, she was meant to do japa, and on exhale chant the mantra loudly 12 times, then softly 12 times and then chant the mantra mentally 12 times. After the practice she was asked to sit quietly for five to 10 minutes. One time per day, she was also asked to listen to the first two paragraphs of Daśa-śāntayaḥ, a longer chant dedicated to inner peace.

One week after the practice had been given, the student gave a quick feedback reporting that reciting the mantra made her feel more centered. She also said that the mental recitation was really hard for her to do, as her mind was racing and she felt a continuous urge to move.

Two weeks into the practice she found it a bit easier to commit to the mental recitation and felt that her awareness in general was becoming stronger, meaning she felt more aware of negative things or patterns in her own life. She was noticing that if she consciously took space and time for herself, the pattern of keeping herself continuously busy was not coming up so strongly.

One month into the practice she had come to the realization that her pattern to continuously do things was connected to a deep feeling of insecurity and unworthiness. She was also noticing that when she was skipping her practice, she felt much more frenzy and nervous throughout the day. It made her commit stronger to the practice.

One and a half months into the practice, the student was on holiday and therefore the meeting was cancelled.

Two months into the practice we had the meeting while the student was doing a pilgrimage walk in Spain (Santiago de Compostela). The student was still keeping herself busy, wanting to go to a Vipassana retreat straight after the walk to work there. She said that it had helped her listening to the longer chant while walking, because she felt really nervous when she was not able to move. It showed that the Vāta was still so strong that any form of 'slowing down' (thoughts, movements) was really difficult for her. She came to the realization that slowing down made her feel herself, and that sometimes feeling the pain body was really hard to bear.

Two and a half months into the practice she was noticing the suppressed emotional pain even more. In the session, we identified the underlying cause that in order to be accepted as a child by her father, she always had to function. This kind of continuous functioning was the reason for her continuous wish to do and act. She also noticed that she was stuffing herself with food to feel nourished.

Because of what the student had reported with her childhood, I felt she needed a mantra that was giving her a stronger nourishing support. Something that would make her feel held. She was given the same practice

with “Om śrīm srīyaiḥ namaḥ”, a mantra of the goddess Lakshmi, the universal mother and divine feminine.

Because of traveling schedules, we had our last meeting after three months had passed. The student gave a general feedback that the “śāntiḥ” mantra had given her a lot of peace, especially in the body. She felt that she didn’t feel as tense, and even felt more peaceful after having a coffee. The mantra for the divine feminine on the other hand felt extremely soothing for her. She felt it had a much stronger connection to her heart. She felt that her sleep was improving and that she was becoming softer on herself.

### *VI.9 Case 9*

Student number nine was a 66 year old retired teacher from Texas, USA. She was mentioning that she wanted to step into her power more and that she wanted to open her heart. She felt a bit isolated in her life and a bit aloof. She felt a certain numbness inside and also an anxiety to feel her own emotions. She said that she did not feel safe with her emotions and she was suppressing feelings like sadness and anger. She felt as if she had build an armor around herself in the past years. She also felt that she was sabotaging herself and not loving herself enough. She thought she was not really showing up as herself and it made her even more agitated with herself. She said that she had also gained a lot of weight in the last years. This student had not practiced any yoga before.

She seemed very heavy and depressed. I felt a heavy energy coming from her childhood and that she needed some clearing. She was mentioning that her father had died of an alcohol addiction, but at that point the student did not go into more circumstances of her childhood. I chose “Mām pavitram kuru”, a mantra that helps clear negative energies from the past. She was also supposed to listen to “Pavamana Sūktam”, a very potent chant that is traditionally used in India to clear houses and spaces and rid them of negative energies. We as humans are also a space that ‘houses’ positive or negative energies at any moment of time.

Her practice started with her breathing freely for twelve breaths while touching her heart. In that way, she, like some of the other participants, was meant to come back to herself and connect stronger to her heart. Then she was asked to do śārīra nyāsa for three rounds accompanied in each position with the mantra. Then she was supposed to lie on the floor with the knees bent (Apānasana) and on inhale straighten the legs towards the ceiling and take the arms over the head (Urdhva Prasṛta Padāsana), and on exhale come back to bent knees position while chanting the mantra.



For her, because I felt that she needed to move the energy out as well as move a little bit in general to fight the heaviness, I built in this very tiny movement sequence. Afterwards, she was meant to stay lying on her back with her hands on her heart, chanting the mantra loudly 12 times, then softly 12 times and chanting the mantra mentally 12 times. I thought that a strong connection to her heart will allow her to open herself more to her emotional plane and pain body. After the practice she was asked to stay lying for five to 10 minutes. One time per day, she was also asked to listen to the longer Pavamana Sūktam chant.

After two weeks the student reported that she found the long chant especially helpful for her and that she had started listening to it twice daily, one time in the morning before getting out of bed and another time before bedtime. She felt it changing something for her on very subtle levels. She was telling that the practice helped her very much in starting the day and being motivated to get out of bed. After the practice she felt more centered and less reactive. But she was also noticing that it was not sustaining itself throughout the day, that she was losing the feeling of being centered at some point during the day. She could feel her own depression now stronger.

After one month the student told that she had had a very profound heart opening on one of the days, in which during the practice she started crying and she felt as if she was releasing sadness and heaviness that had built up inside over the years. She felt herself being lighter. She was asking for a new practice as she felt that she wanted something that supported her stronger in taking up her power and expressing herself more strongly to the world. She was also asking for something that would help her lose more of the physical weight.

I changed her mantra to “Om̐ dūm̐ durgāyai namaḥ”, a chant to the goddess Durgā. Durgā is a fierce goddess that is fully in her own power and can destroy even terrible demons. I was thinking that Durgā would be appropriate, as she embodies someone standing in their own power, but also because she destroys inner demons. I also included an easier version of Sūrya Namaskar samantraka (with mantra) in the practice (starting seated on heels in Vajrāsana and going up to Adho Mukha Śvanāsana) to help her move the heaviness and also assist her with the weight loss. After the adapted Sun Salutation, she was meant to breathe freely for 12 breaths. Then she was meant to touch her navel, chanting the mantra 12 times loudly. The area around the navel is one’s own power center and I felt it appropriate for her to express her voice loudly in that area. Then she was meant to chant the mantra 12 times softly while touching the heart,

representing a further opening and a different quality of power. Then she was meant to chant the mantra 12 times mentally with the hands residing in her lap, and, like in the other course, spend five to 10 minutes quietly in observation, this time seated. She was also advised to listen to Durgā Sūktam, a longer chant on Durgā and the fire god Agni, at least once a day.

After one and a half months the student confessed that she had not done the new practice. She needed to be motivated again to further continue with the practice.

The student then started traveling and was only available after three months had passed. She reported that the Durgā mantra had given her a lot of strength, and that she had practiced almost daily. She said that especially when placing her hand on the solar plexus she could release some fears every time she was touching it. She said that overall she felt the mantra as balancing and giving her a boost in her self-confidence. She said the biggest gain from the ‘Pavitram’ clearing mantra that she had in the beginning was that she felt it had helped her discern her own energy and emotions from the other people around her. It had also helped her come back more into the heart.

She concluded that she felt very different in her life now, and that one of the biggest changes that she could observe in herself was her new capacity to cry openly and to allow her emotions to come out. This made her also feel more alive. In the past month, she had met a new man in her life and she felt really very happy with the progress she had made.

### *VI.10 Case 10*

Case 10 was a 41-year old massage therapist and yoga teacher from London. For over 15 years she was suffering already from Hypothyroidism. The student came because she felt a big disconnection from her heart. She wanted to feel herself more and wanted to connect stronger to herself. She was doubting her relationship as well as the place where she was living. She said that she didn't have much self-confidence and that it was hard for her to focus. I felt her as a Pitta constitution with a Vāta aggravation. Her incapacity to focus and root down at the place where she was living as well as in herself showed a basic lack in the foundation of the Mūladhāra Chakra. If people are not rooted in their first chakra, they lack stability and most of all they are on some level disconnected from the self. I felt huge childhood issues. The student said that she had left her home country with her parents at age nine. As the biggest theme that came up in the assessment was her need for support, tools were needed that would hold

space for her in a gentle and loving way. This student was familiar with mantra chanting and this tradition.

The mantra that was chosen for her was the mantra of the divine feminine, 'Om Śrīm Śrīyai Namaḥ'. This mantra really often offers a very feminine, motherly, protective and soothing energy to a practitioner. It also very strongly correlates with the heart.

The practice of student number 10 was to start with the hands on the heart and take 12 free breaths, to come back and connect to her heart-space. She was then meant to move from Vajrāsana forward bend to a Cakravakāsana variation (without lifting one leg). She was meant to stay in Vajrāsana forward bend for a whole breath, chanting the mantra on exhale, then coming forward on inhale and going back again on exhale while chanting the mantra. Vajrāsana forward bend is immensely calming as the forehead is resting on the floor. It is a very relaxing posture as such, but also the fact that the forehead rests on the floor offers additional tranquility. After that she was meant to do one round of Śārira Nyāsa with the mantra, placing it all around her and creating a protective shield. Then, while keeping the hands on the heart, she was doing mantra japa, chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. She was then supposed to sit or lie down for 5 to 10 minutes and observe what is happening inside her. Once per day, she was additionally advised to listen to Laghunyāsaḥ, a chant that connects the different parts of our body back to our heart and a higher consciousness.

Two weeks into the practice, the student reported that the mantra and practice was working on her heart in very strong ways. She had a vision of the sun when connecting to the mantra. She felt warmer, more alive and more able to communicate her problems to her husband. She felt the longer chant was grounding and calming her. She felt moving into a space of a more honest and authentic expression.

One month into the practice the student wrote me an email that she was having huge fights with her parents and that a lot of her own suppressed emotions and thoughts and feelings about her childhood were released and communicated. She felt relieved but also in a big transformative process.

The student did not come back for the rest of the evaluation as she lacked time. After several trials from my side without her getting back to me, I left the case open. Obviously she had gained some benefits from feeling safe enough to communicate emotions and thoughts to her parents and husband.

### *VI.11 Case 11*

The 11th case was a 47-year old director of communications from Tucson, Arizona, USA. She came to therapy because she was noticing some controlling behavior in herself. She was also having anxieties and reported that she had had anxiety attacks in the past. The student was telling that control was a mechanism that she used to deal with her fears. She was facing a lot of changes at that time in her life. One of her colleagues was leaving the work space after 16 years and it made her feel uncomfortable. Her parents were moving house and that also made her feel slightly uncomfortable. She told that in her parental home alcoholism was a problem and that there had always been a mode of unpredictability. She wanted something that would help her relax a bit more, and the word that she was using to describe what she was hoping and wishing for was 'flow'. From what she was describing it became clear that she had adopted a very masculine strategy to deal with her fears, to rather control them than allow them. I also felt that she needed support and protection. The student, at that time, was already working with the mantra on Śraddhā in her regular practice, which connects to the topic of self confidence. She was therefore already practicing in this tradition. But I felt because the control pattern that she held was masculine and because she expressed her need for flow and spontaneity, I gave her the mantra of the divine feminine, 'Om Śrīm Śrīyai Namaḥ'.

Her practice started with her hands on the heart, prolonging the exhale in each breath. It was supposed to help her come back to herself and also have the focus on langhana and the exhale, relaxing her. Then she was meant to do Śārira Nyāsa for three rounds, placing the mantra on seven points of the body. This really helps to place the mantra like a protective shield, around the practitioner. Then I advised her to do Kara Nyāsa, a specific Nyāsa in which we use the fingers. This Nyāsa helps to strongly focus in and work on Vāta, which is also one of the main contributing factors to anxiety. Afterwards, she was told to do the mantra japa, chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. She was meant to sit in the vibration for five to 10 minutes. Once per day, she was meant to listen to Śraddhā Sūktam, the longer chant on the goddess Śraddhā, invoking conviction and a stronger confidence in herself.

Two weeks into the practice she had made a spontaneous visit to her sister and felt some softening happening.

One month into the practice she reported that she made a spontaneous trip to North Carolina and had spent a lot of time outside and at the beach.

She felt much better concerning her anxieties. She said she felt more sensual and at ease. She compared the effect of the mantra to a tranquilizer. She felt she was better able to keep up boundaries. She felt more able to communicate at work and was noticing that due to her newfound softness, work colleagues suddenly approached her and wanted to talk to her. She was more relaxed with her parents moving house. She felt very nourished by the practice. She said that the mantra of Śrī felt nurturing, while Śraddhā Sūktam felt fortifying and was increasing her self-confidence.

One month and a half into the practice she said how important the practice was for her to feel grounded. She felt stronger connected to the mantra now and felt the vibration of the sounds working on her inside. She felt the longer chant helping her in her work environment. Usually she would feel quite aggravated at work, but she noticed that she felt more composed these days. She felt a lot of anxieties releasing. She had a new colleague now at work and was noticing that the change was actually good, because the new colleague was really nice. She felt more confident presenting her projects at work and more able to speak freely.

Two months into the practice she told that she had had a meltdown. She said she felt overloaded at work and was agitated. She realized she could release the anger by starting to cry. She noticed that she was holding space for a lot of people in her work and was seeing that she could hold up boundaries in a softer way. She also reported that she had bought herself a very feminine purse with flowers on it, something that before the mantra practice would have not been necessarily her taste. She said that she felt it was the vibration of Śrī.

After two and a half months we did not have a session, the last session took place after three months.

In our last session, she was very happy with the practice that she was still doing almost every day. She felt the chant as integrated, felt calmer, more at ease and was able to sustain during a more stressful phase at work thanks to the mantra. She saw herself as less angry and aggravated and more capable to voice her own ideas. She was telling that she sensed that the mantras were really helping her release and that she was able to be vulnerable and accepting in these situations. Therefore the anxieties were not present at this point. She felt her femininity and sensuality had increased, she had bought make-up, lipstick and felt more attractive. She felt herself as softer, too.

## *VI.12 Case 12*

The 12th case was a 67-year old massage therapist from California, USA. She was coming to therapy because of a general feeling of anxiety. She told that she had had a very unstable home and mother and never felt really safe in her life. She felt disassociated from her body and her body was becoming increasingly unhealthy. She felt a lot of pain in the pelvis. She wanted to be able to focus better, but felt unable to. She wanted to have small movements in the practice that would enable her to connect stronger to her body again. She had thyroid problems and was taking medication. She had practiced different forms of Yoga throughout her life and had also done Kirtan chanting before.

The mantra that she was given was ‘Mām Pāhi’, a very soothing, grounding mantra that means “please protect me”. It usually offers a lot of comfort while being extremely langhana, relaxing. She started her practice with an adaptation of Sūrya Namaskar, starting from Vajrāsana (sitting on heels) and ending in Adho Mukha Śvānāsana. She then did Śārira Nyāsa with the mantra and then was asked to do mantra japa while placing the hands on the heart, chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. Afterwards, she was supposed to rest for five to 10 minutes. Once per day, she was asked to listen to Śraddhā Sūktam, to give her more confidence and strength.

After two weeks she reported that the Maha Prāṇa, used for the syllable “h” in the mantra, had triggered an internal hernia and that had made her fearful. Usually for pronouncing this syllable, you have to contract your abdomen. She stopped the pronunciation with the support of the abdominal strength, but still felt discomfort in her solar plexus. She felt a birth-trauma come up with it that felt undigested, remembering that her mother had almost died when she was born. She was reporting that her toilet movement had improved, that from not even being able to evacuate every day she was starting to eliminate daily.

After a month of the practice, she still felt not good in her solar plexus and also sort of frozen in her lower back and feet. She sensed that she could not move forward in life, that she was sort of frozen in life. I asked her to direct the focus more on the pelvis and legs and to find things in life that contribute to her joy rather than focus on negative feelings.

A month and a half later she had realized her father’s anger and her mother’s emotional numbness that were present for her when growing up. She was extremely tired, also because she had stopped her thyroid

medication. She was admitting to be in a very cold, emotionless partnership with her husband and that financial reasons were the cause for her staying. She felt that her partner and herself had the same woundings.

Two months into the practice she felt more calm. She was beginning to feel a bit safer and was noticing joy in her friendships.

Two and half months into the practice we did not talk, so the last conversation was after three months had passed.

Concludingly, she told that the mantra had helped her a lot. She felt a lot of realizations were coming due to the mantra, that her body was able to relax more and also that she had released quite a lot of fears. She said that the pain in her solar plexus was gone as soon as she allowed to see the emotional environment that she grew up in more clearly. She was hopeful to sustain the more relaxed and comfortable state that she was now in.

### *VI.13 Case 13*

Student number 13 was a 33-year old artist and Yoga teacher from Ibiza, Spain. She had experience with different traditions of Yoga and Kirtan chanting. She was wishing for more stability in her life. She had travelled a lot in the last years and didn't have a steady home at that point in her life. She was hoping to create a home and a family in the near future and wanted to become pregnant. She was telling that her ancestry was Jewish and that they had had to leave their home country in fear of genocide. Also this student's father left the family when she was very little, therefore she was lacking parental stability when she was growing up. The lack of stability was visible also as a Vāta aggravation, with fast speech, a thin body and a lack of grounding. She felt insecure about her future and said that she was lacking boundaries.

The first practice that was given to her worked with the mantra "Om bhūmyai namaḥ". This mantra is a mantra to the Earth Goddess, Bhu Devi. It was meant to ground her, connect her stronger to the Earth and help her center more. It was also meant to target the first chakra, that deals with the fundamental security, grounding and rooting and reduce Vāta. The practice started with her putting her hands on her heart and breathing freely for 12 breaths. Then she was supposed to do one round of Sārīra Nyāsa, followed by mantra japa, chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally.

Once per day, she was supposed to listen to Mantra Puṣṭam, a chant to the water. This chant works with the symbolism of a blossoming flower in the water and is a chant that is traditionally used to help women conceive and increase fertility.

Two weeks into the practice the student admitted that she was unable to commit to the daily practice. She felt overwhelmed and somehow incapable of practicing. Knowing that she was creative and an artist and a very spiritual person, I asked her to create a ritual around the practice. She later reported that she had made an altar space and had put crystals and that this altar space had helped her to commit to the practice. She also started involving her partner in the practice (she practiced with him), which also made her commit stronger to it.

One month into the practice she felt stronger connected to the mantra and the earth. At the same time she was noticing a lot of negative patterns in her life. She had met a Yoga guru that was overstepping her boundaries. She was noticing that her boyfriend was not really there for her. She was understanding how much she had to rely on herself to get by. At the same time she saw that her art was changing, she was using softer colors and a lot of purple and red in her paintings. She was starting to take better care of herself and had begun a new food regimen with healthier foods.

One and a half months into the practice the student was reporting a lot of changes in her life. Her relationship had just ended and she felt very unsupported and unstable. Additionally, she had gone to some shamanic ceremonies that made her feel even more unstable. I therefore changed the mantra to Mām Pāḥi, a very relaxing and soothing mantra.

The student was traveling after our meeting for over two months, so our final assessment of her experience and process was given through email to me. She reported that the first mantra (to the Earth Goddess) aided her in establishing a deep connection to Mother Earth and grounded her more. The second mantra helped her in establishing a deeper sense of security, and she felt deeply comforted. Through this increased feeling of being held, the student said that she could allow herself to take down layers of guarding and open her heart more. She added that both mantras reinforced her creative power; which she noticed in her everyday life through finding more ways of freely expressing her authentic self through painting, singing and personal relationships to other beings.



#### *VI.14 Case 14*

The student number 14 was a 34 year old photographer and yoga teacher from London, UK. She had practiced in this tradition before and was also familiar with mantras and Vedic chanting. The student came to therapy wanting to feel less worried about her life in general. She felt a lot of tension in her job, relationship and family life. She was often having stress with her parents. She also felt very rigid and wanted to soften. She was hoping to attract the right partner, become more calm, heart-centered and soft.

The mantra that was chosen for the student was 'Om Śrīm Śriyai Namaḥ'. This mantra is connected to the divine feminine and the goddess Lakshmi. It usually helps regain more femininity, more softness and spontaneity. Usually especially for people that feel rigid in their life it can support transformation. The student's practice started with 12 breaths of free breathing with her hands on her heart, connecting her back to her own heart-space. Then she was supposed to do Śārīra Nyāsa with the mantra, followed by mantra japa: chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. Afterwards, she was meant to sit or lie down for five to 10 minutes and integrate the sound. Once per day, the student was advised to listen to Śrī Sūktam, a longer chant on goddess Lakshmi and the divine feminine that bestows diverse blessings and abundance on the practitioner.

Two weeks into the practice, the student reported that the mantra had had a very calming effect on her. She said that it somehow created a cocoon of gentle protection around her and she perceived a glow of golden light. She felt strong sensations of serenity and peace. This calming effect also seemed to influence her family, she perceived her mother as more calm.

After one month, the student was traveling with her mother. She continued to practice in front of her mother and felt her mother rejecting her practice and the mantra. She still continued with her practice daily and felt that her mother was suddenly softening towards the mantra practice. She felt that the mantra had the capacity to soften sharp edges. She thought she was getting more gentle and soft and that this was also influencing the people in her vicinity. She sensed a strong healing energy coming from the mantra. After one and a half months, the student started selling some of her clothes and was noticing that she was suddenly attracted to shopping and buying dresses. She had not felt worthy to buy herself new clothes before, so she saw this as a sign of a newly emerging self-love and self-care. She still felt the softening and calming effect on herself and also started to process

negative ideas that she held around the topic of wealth and some traumas connected to wealth that were running in the family line.

After two months, the student still felt an increasing sense of serenity, calmness and grace. She considered herself more feminine, more graceful and more calm. She strongly connected to a golden energy that she perceived in the mantra.

Two and a half months into the practice the meeting could not take place.

In her final assessment after three months, the student said that with the mantra, she had really felt as if she was resting in the lap of a mother. She had sensed comforting and protecting energies around her all throughout the three months. The student was still practicing the mantra daily. She was more peaceful and felt more capable in dealing with negative energies in her environment. She also reported that even other people had told her that she was becoming more soft and that she was more receptive. She felt less stressed and worried and was really pleased with the mantra results.

#### *VI.15 Case 15*

The 15th student was a 35-year old yoga teacher and entrepreneur from Ibiza, Spain. She had practiced in different traditions before and was accustomed to Kirtan chanting. When the student came to therapy, she was pregnant and had about one month's time before giving birth. She still wanted to participate in the research. The student felt very confident about the birth, but was seeking to establish a stronger connection to her baby. She felt that she did not really have a lot of time for herself, as she was pregnant with her second child and her first child needed a lot of attention. She thought she did not have the space to care for herself. She felt a lot of frustration and anger and was wishing for more relaxation, more calm and more equilibrium. She was mentioning a strong connection to water and that water always made her more relaxed.

The mantra that was chosen for her was "Om śrīm sriyai namaḥ". Her practice started with her putting one hand on her heart and one hand on the belly, consciously connecting to her child from the space of heart and breathing freely for 12 breaths. She was then supposed to do Nāḍi Śodhana breathing for 12 breaths. This is an alternate nostril breathing that helps to center. She then was advised to do one round of Śārīra Nyāsa with the mantra. Afterwards the practice continued with mantra japa, again with placing one hand on her heart and one hand on her abdomen. She was

chanting the mantra 12 times loudly, 12 times softly and 12 times mentally. She was told to sit or lie down afterwards and absorb the vibrations. She was also meant to listen to “Mantra Puşpam”, a longer chant on water and blossoming, once per day.

After two weeks the meeting was cancelled because the student’s husband was sick and she had no time for the meeting.

After one month the student gave the feedback that the practice was assisting her and that she felt really calm and connected to the baby when she was practicing. She said that her son started moving a lot every time that she was chanting. She sensed warmth throughout the body and was really happy with how the practice made her feel more peaceful afterwards. This message was about one week before the student gave birth.

There was no more possibility to connect and continue the research after her son was born.

## VII. Summary of Conclusions

### VII.1. General Conclusions

All students benefitted strongly from the mantra practice, even if for some of them the healing processes could have continued. Most of the students were able to sustain their practice over the three months, with some of them continuing even after the research period was over.

For three students the mantras were changed within the three months period as their needs had changed or a different mantra seemed more appropriate. In Yoga therapy we give a starting practice, but it is always important to stay open as a therapist and see whether the tool that we choose really resonates with the student and works for them. For a practice to be healing, our job is to find the appropriate tool that really supports them in the best way possible.

One student had extreme difficulty with the meaning of the mantra in the beginning, as she could not connect rationally to it and because her own self definition at that moment of time was the exact opposite of the meaning of the mantra. It showed that in such cases it can be more helpful if the care seeker is not necessarily given the meaning of the mantra, so as to receive the vibration of the mantra without any mental bias or judgement. After this person was reminded to focus on the sound itself rather than on its meaning, she was able to open herself to the vibration and had a more supportive experience with it.

Most of the mantras that were given were langhana mantras, helping to create more serenity, calm and peace, like the Śāntīḥ mantra or "Mām Pāḥī". People reported more peace and also a sense of feeling more secure and protected through these mantras.

Brahmana mantras, like the mantra for goddess Durgā, seemed helpful if the person was rather depressed and more heavy in thoughts and the body. It was supporting them in feeling more energized and in general lighter.

For the people that had very aggravated Vāta, the practices with the mantras seemed to be most difficult. One person admitted that chanting mentally was very hard for her, because her thoughts started racing when she recited internally. It was more easy for the student to focus on the sounds when she was able to hear her own voice.

Also for these students, simply creating the space to sit down and do their practices seemed more challenging in general. In one case, I told the

student to create her own sacred space at home and when she did (she placed sacred objects and crystals), it was more easy for her to commit to the practice. One student that was given the Gāyatrī mantra to help her overcome negativity, also had a really difficult time keeping up her focus in her practice. What became evident for me in this study was also that people need to be able to focus on the mantra so that it can have its maximum effect. If the person is unable to focus, the effects will be less.

Looking at the majority of all cases, a repeating process can be observed which seemed to be unfolding over the three months. In the first weeks, most mantra practices seemed to have a more pacifying effect on the practitioner. In Yoga therapy, we call this effect Śamanam. It means that symptoms are getting better. People felt more calm, more centered through their practices and overall more content. Over time, this centeredness led them to deeper realizations about the nature of their patterns, their problems or deeper lying unresolved trauma. In Yoga therapy, we refer to this deeper work and elimination of underlying root causes as Śodhanam. Some of these deeper realizations were painful and brought up deeper and more challenging processes for the students. At the end of the three months period, most of the students had integrated some of the realizations and had achieved a new stage of health.

What was interesting to observe was that when care seekers become more centered and calm, their capacity for self-observation and self-inquiry (svādhyāya) automatically increases. In everyday life, a lot of people lose that capacity to observe themselves. As deep seated patterns can only be changed through one's own profound realization inside, I found this as one of the major contributions to the healing capacity of mantras. The students were so strongly centered and calm through the mantra repetition, that a deeper understanding of themselves opened up. In that way, we can also start to understand the Sanskrit definitions of sickness and health given in the beginning of my thesis paper. We become more healthy when we are stronger connected to ourselves and to that calm inner space, because from that space we can have deeper realizations about ourselves.

One of the questions for this research was also in which way mantras "protect the mind", as stated in one of the most important definitions of mantra. Considering the research, we can again relate this to the centering and reconnecting momentum that mantras instigate. There was a detachment taking place from the storyline that usually runs in peoples heads and that made them unable to perceive root causes themselves. People can be trapped in a pattern, without seeing different ways of changing or creating more supportive patterns for themselves.

Again, mantras seem to offer that, they can bring you into a space from which you are more capable to observe neutrally and understand yourself. Also, in one case, in a very intense family situation that would have caused the practitioner to be afraid, this particular student suddenly heard the mantra repeating in her head. It enabled her to tackle the situation in a different way than she would have usually done. In that way, mantras are also protective, as they offer us, through a momentum of detachment, the capacity to replace a more negative habitual pattern with a more positive one.

Apart from these general observations, the different mantras had very distinct individual qualities that seemed to aid the practitioners in their healing processes.

One of the most interesting observations was the very subtle qualities that each mantra seemed to bestow on the practitioner. One of the mantras that showed this most apparently in my research was “Om śrīm śrīyai namaḥ”, the mantra of Lakshmi and the divine feminine. This mantra did not only help people feel extremely nourished, held and protected, but also offered very distinctly feminine qualities. Students were reporting to become more soft, more sensual, more feminine. Some of them started wearing more make-up or buying more feminine clothing. Some of them became more spontaneous. Not only their own perception of themselves changed due to the mantra, but also other people told them that they had become softer or more approachable.

In Yoga, we believe that we attract the qualities of whatever it is we hold in our minds. If we hold the mantra of a certain goddess in our mind, we connect not just consciously but also subconsciously to the energies of that goddess. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, beauty, nourishment and love. All of these qualities became much more apparent in the practitioners that worked with her mantra. One practitioner was even starting to question her own negative beliefs around money.

In general, I observed that mantras for the divine feminine or different goddesses strongly support healing. In this study, it showed that practitioners felt deeply held by these mantras and that there is a motherly, protective element to these mantras that makes people feel safe and secure and more capable to open themselves to a transformative process.

In some cases, the mantras also seemed to have an effect on the environment. In one case, the student was practicing in front of her mother who seemed to reject the mantra practice at first, but at some point seemed to be positively influenced by it as well. In another case, the Gāyatrī mantra was picked up by one of the children of the practitioner, because the child saw the mother practicing it every day. In that case the child started to use the mantra whenever he felt agitated and it had a positive effect on him, which in turn made the mother more calm and peaceful.

Some of the mantra practitioners had very deep insights into the root causes for some of their own negative patterns. For some of them, childhood traumas and problems were coming up to be reflected upon. Others managed to overcome their own incapacities due to the support of the mantra practice. For those that managed to change existing negative patterns, deeper healing could occur.

The hypothesis of this study was to show the deep healing effects that mantras can have on practitioners. This research proves this as correct if the student gets the appropriate mantra and is able to commit themselves to it over a longer period of time. Also it is important that the care seeker actually focuses on the mantra and is open to receive its benefits.

## VII.2. Final thoughts

Mantras strongly work on unconscious layers as well as on spiritual layers of existence. They offer a chance to recenter yourself and come to a space of clarity. Mantras can connect people to deep seated traumas and root causes. In their understanding lies a part of the healing.

Some of the effects of mantras seem to be rather straight forward, others seem to hold effects that are not necessarily known or unfold different effects over time.

For us as therapists, it asks for the capacity to hold a very safe container space, an openness to as well as an understanding of the psycho- spiritual dimension of mantra and also the in-depth knowledge about the effects of different mantras.

Unfortunately, many of the effects of mantras are not known anymore. I am hoping that this research and many alike inspire mantra practitioners of long time to start putting down their own expertise and experiences in writing so as to share the richness of these ancient sounds and their profound capacities for healing.

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## Study Materials:

- From Dr. Kausthub Desikachar's Seminar "Mantra Yoga, April 2014
- KHYF Vedic Chant Teacher Training. Module 4, 2016
- KHYF Vedic Chant Teacher Training. Module 1-3, 2015-2016
- Yoga Therapy Training, Module 1, August 2014



Appendix-  
Practice  
Examples

Case 1

10.7.17



① Hände aufs Herz. 12 Atemzüge frei



② santra nyasa

berühre Füße, Knie, Oberschenkel, Nabel,  
Herz, Hals, Kopf

3 Rote Runden

chant "Ma aham sarvam"



③ Chant "Ma aham sarvam"

12 mal laut

12 mal soft

12 mal mental





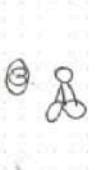

④ Hände aufs Herz legen

5-10 Minuten der vibration nachspüren

+ Purge Suklam

Case 2

25.6.17





- ①  Hands on heart. Visualize sun in the heart  
IN + EX = free 12 br
- ②  Touch feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hips, abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat, mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head  
EX = chant
- ③  Touch navel: chant loudly 12 times  
Touch heart: chant softly 12 times  
Touch head: chant mentally 12 times
- ④  Sit quietly or lie down quietly  
5-10 minutes

Once per day listen to Gayatri kavacam

Om tatsavitur varēnyam  
bhargo devasya dhīmahi  
dhiyo yo nahī pracodayāt ॥

### Case 3

25.6.17

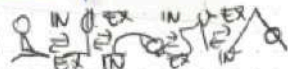
- ①  Hands on heart, IN + EX - free 10 br
- ②  touch feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hips, abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat, mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head  
1st round: Hā Vū  
2nd round: Hā Vū Hā  
3rd round: Hā Vū Hā Vū
- ③  touch navel: Chant loudly Hā Vū 12 Times  
touch heart: Chant softly Hā Vū 12 Times  
touch head: Chant mentally 12 Times
- ④  sit quietly or lie down 5-10 minutes


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
once per day listen to Hā Vū chant / tattiriyas


## Case 4



25.6.17

①  4 Rounds, EX = Chant Mām Pāhī

②  Hands on heart  
10 br  
IN = Free  
EX = Free

③  touch feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hips,  
abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat,  
mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head  
3 rounds, EX = Chant

④  touch navel. Chant loudly 12 times  
touch heart. Chant softly 12 times  
touch head. Chant mentally 12 times






⑤  sit quietly or  lie down quietly  
5-10 minutes

Once per day listen to Śraddhā Suktam

## Case 5

Om Śraddhāyai,  
namah

25.6.17





- ①  Hands on heart. Free IN + EX 12 br
- ②  Touch feet, knees, thighs, lips, abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat, mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head  
EX = chant 3 Rounds
- ③  - Place hands on navel  
chant loudly 12 times  
- Place hands on heart  
chant softly 12 times  
- Place hands on head.  
chant mentally 12 times
- ④  or  Sit or lie quietly for 5-10 minutes

---

One time per day listen to Śraddhā Suktam

## Case 6

26.6.17 (given 27.6.17)





1.  Hands on heart IN+EX freely 12 br
2.  Touch feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hips, abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat, mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head, hold a couple of sec. after IN  
EX - Chant  
Om Sri Sri Sanyai Namah  
3 rounds  
at belmrite @ facebook do 45%
3.  Chant mantra loudly 12 times  
Chant mantra softly 12 times  
Chant mantra mentally 12 times
4.  Sit quietly with the vibrations 5 minutes

---

Once per day listen to Sri Suktam

## Case 7

29.6.17


- ①  Hands on heart. 12 br. IN+EX freely
- ②  Touch feet, knees, thighs, hips, abdomen, navel, heart, shoulders, throat, mouth, ears, eyes, forehead, top of head  
EX = Oni dwin durgayai namah
- ③  IN + Hold after inh. 1-3 sec  
EX = Chant mantra loudly 12 T  
Chant mantra softly 12 T  
Chant mantra mentally 12 T
- ④  Sit quietly 5-10 minutes


—  
Once per day listen to Durga Suktem





Case 8 20.9.17

Prachin ②

①  Hands on heart 12 br

②  Touch feet, knees, thighs,  
navel, heart, throat, top of  
head ex = chant *Om śrī m śrī yai  
nau dh*

③  chant mantra  
12 Times loudly  
12 Times softly  
12 Times mentally

④  sit quietly 5-10 minutes

listen to śrī suktaṁ aṅga per day


Case 9


1

14.7.17

Mām pavitrām kuru

given 15.7.17

①  12 breaths freely

②  Touch feet, knees, thighs,  
navel, heart, throat,  
top of head

3 Rounds

Mām pavitrām kuru

③ 

6 Times, ex = chant Mām pavitrām  
kuru

④  Touch heart

Chant 12 times loudly  
12 times softly  
12 times mentally

⑤ 

Rest 5 minutes






---

Once a day listen to  
pavamana suktram

Case 11

15.7.17

Om srim sriyai nama


- ①  Hands on heart, EX. EX ≡ 8 breaths
- ②  Touch feet, knees, thighs, navel, heart, throat, top of head  
EX = chant Om srim sriyai nama
- ③  kara Nyasa  
EX = chant 1 Round
- ④  chant  
12T loudly  
12T softly  
12T mentally
- ⑤  sit quietly or lie down  
stay with the vibration 5-10 min

listen or chant


Śraddhāśuklam  
once per day


Case 10

15.7.12 Om śrīm śrīyai namaḥ

①  Hands on heart. 12 br freely

②  \* stay 1 br 6 Times  
EX= chant Om śrīm śrīyai namaḥ




③  Touch feet, knees, thighs, navel,  
heart, throat, top of head 1 Round  
EX= chant

④  Hands on heart  
chant 1d Times loudly  
1d Times softly  
12 Times mentally

⑤  sit quietly or lie down  
5-10 minutes

---

○ once per day listen to kagunyāsaḥ

- ①  Hands at heart. Free breathing 12 br
- ②  śānta nyāsa touch feet, knees, hips, navel, heart, ~~throat~~ throat, top of head  
on bhūmyai namah
- ③  chait mantra

12 Times loudly  
12 Times softly  
12 Times mentally

kisthu to Mantra Anupam aice per day

Case 14

3.8.17



Breathe freely labor  
hands on heart



Śāntā nyāsa Touch feet knees, thighs  
navel, heart, throat, top of head  
Om śrīm śrīyai namaḥ 3 rounds








Chant mantra  
12 Times loudly  
12 Times softly  
12 Times mentally








sit or lie down 5-10 min

---

once per day lietu to śrī outera

- Practice (2)
- ①  Hands at heart  
12 br
  - ②  Extend exhalation  
12 br
  - ③  Touch feet, knees, thighs, navel, heart,  
throat, top of head  
EX= Chant Mān Pāṭhi
  - ④  Chant Mān Pāṭhi  
12T loudly  
12T softly  
12T mentally
  - ⑤  Rest 5-10 minutes

- ①  One hand on heart, one hand on belly IN=EX 12 br
- ②  Nadi Sodhana 12 br / 6 rounds
- ③  Touch feet, ~~ankles~~ knees, <sup>thighs/hips</sup> navel, heart ③ Rounds  
throat, top of head  
chant om śm śmyai Namah
- ④  Hand on heart and navel  
or lie down  
chant  
12 T loudly  
12 T softly  
12 T meditatively
- ⑤  sit quietly or lie down 5-10 minutes

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listen to śāśāntaya one time per day